

Chile bans marketing of toys in children's food

August 2 2012, by LUIS ANDRES HENAO



This Nov. 8, 2010 file photo shows a Happy Meal at a McDonald's restaurant in San Francisco, Ca. McDonald's, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken and other fast-food companies are being sued in Chile for violating the country's new law against including toys with children's meals. The law took effect in July 2012 and its author, Sen. Guido Gerardi, filed suit Wednesday, Aug. 1, 2012, accusing the companies of knowingly endangering the health of children by marketing kids' meals with toys. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

(AP) — A new law in Chile aims to take some of the fun out of fast-food by forcing McDonald's, Burger King, KFC and other restaurants to stop including toys and other goodies with children's meals.

The companies are still using toys to draw in Chile's increasingly chubby children more than a month after the ban took effect on June 7, Sen. Guido Girardi said as he filed a formal complaint Wednesday with the

health ministry.

"These businesses know that this food damages the health of children and they know that the law is in effect. They're using fraudulent and abusive means," Girardi said.

The complaint also targets makers of cereal, popsicles and other products that attract children with toys, crayons or stickers, as well as markets that sell the food.

If Chile's health ministry upholds his allegations, the companies could be forced to remove the goodies or face nominal fines.

The Associated Press left messages seeking reaction with spokesmen for McDonald's Corp., Burger King Worldwide Inc. and KFC's owner, Yum Brands Inc.

Girardi said he wrote the law because nearly a quarter of Chile's 6-year-olds now suffer from childhood obesity — and that its passage came despite seven years of industry lobbying.

"These corporations threatened that if the law was approved there would be no more money for children's foundations, the sick, or athletes, but we were finally able to create a great alliance between the civil society and scientists to defeat these lobbyists," the senator said.

McDonald's Happy Meals — marketed as "Cajitas Felices" in Spanish — have been a major draw for 4-year-old Florencia Moraga, who was playing with her Ice Age movie toys Wednesday night with her father Ricardo at a restaurant in downtown Santiago.

"I loooove McDonald's because of the toys in the Happy Meal!" Florencia said.

Moraga said he takes his daughter every two weeks to the fast-food chain, but would not come back if she becomes overweight.

"She's healthy, skinny, but a kid with obesity was just sitting next to us. If I were his father I wouldn't bring him here," he said.

The Washington-based Center for Science in the Public Interest sued McDonalds over using toys to market its food to children in 2010, but the claim was dismissed in April. San Francisco banned restaurants last year from providing toys along with meals high in fat, salt, and sugar, but McDonalds has continued providing [toys](#) there by charging consumers a small fee for the goodies. A similar measure was defeated in New York.

The experience of both U.S. cities helped Girardi craft his "junk food law," his spokeswoman, Carol Bortnick, said.

Sara Deon, an activist with Corporate Accountability International, campaigned for the measures in San Francisco and New York, and praised [Chile](#) for passing its law. But she said "Chilean public servants should have no illusions" about implementing it.

"Judging from McDonald's response to similar health laws in the U.S. we'd expect the corporation to respond as it long has: it will fight tooth and nail to continue marketing to children," she said. "It will take every opportunity to blame parents for today's health epidemic. Marketing to kids is core to McDonald's brand and to its bottom line."

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